

03/19/92

SHORTGRASS COUNTRY by Monte Noelke

Two or three weeks ago a newscaster reported a mounted policeman in New York had accidentally shot his horse. The hammer on his service revolver hung on his coat sleeve, discharging the weapon. Prognosis from a veterinary clinic predicted satisfactory recovery. No comment was made on a possible change on shortening the sleeves of the uniforms of mounted policemen, or possibly the addition of bullet proof neck shields for the corps' riding stock. If demerits or hearings or suspension of the trooper were considered, the actions weren't picked up in the news.

Shortly after the shooting, the following occurred during our early shearing engagement: One six-year-old well broke mare spooked at what was probably the 19,000th jackrabbit she had seen in her life and caused the unseating of the rider and displacement of his saddle from on her back to underneath her belly.

The resulting delay, recapturing the mare and hunting for the rider, added one hour and twenty minutes to the work day of eight shearers, one wool grader, and three cowboys. The wool warehouseman's supper was interrupted by the late arrival of the wool bags; the jackrabbit was never heard of again: and the mare took a pleasant roll in the dirt after

being officially unsaddled and ate more than her share of the day's rations.

Supposing the mare and the jackrabbit had been found shot at the site of the fallen rider. Imagine you are in the courtroom on the day of the trial, and the likes of Mr. Race Horse Haynes rises and addresses the jury:

"Ladies and gentlemen, obviously the bullet that struck the mare between her eyes occurred when in the excitement of the fall the rider, fearing she might strike the ground head-first, jerked the near side rein, thus pulling her head facing toward him. His only thoughts were saving his faithful steed from serious cranial concussion. (Dramatic pause for the effect to settle.) But in the trauma of the event, the hammer of his pistol hung on his coat sleeve, discharging the shot that ricocheted off her forelock and struck the jackrabbit behind his left ear."

Next to arise is the prosecution, supported by a high stepping fixer and arranger from out of town. The bigshot leans slightly toward the jury box and says:

"Be all this supposition as it may seem in the imagination of Mr. Haynes, but please glance down at your fingers and count slowly to the number 5. And 5, you will recall is the number of .38 Special shells the investigating officer found at the scene. Furthermore, cowboys don't wear

coats on days warm enough to shear sheep, and they only carry sidearms in the movies."

And in the end the jury files in and the foreman addresses the court: "Your honor, we find the accused innocent. Too many sapsuckers like that spooky mare and too many spring-fresh rabbits have left too many cowboys hobbling back to the house on foot. Justice, we think, is long overdue."